DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 102 CG 030 301

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TITLE A Truancy Program: The Successful Partnering of Schools, Parents, and Community Systems.
PUB DATE 2000-08-00
NOTE 31p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counselor Training; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; Graduate Students; Integrated Services; Intervention; Prevention; Program Development; *School Community Relationship; School Counselors; Social Services; *Truancy
IDENTIFIERS *Kansas

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program designed to help court-ordered, truant, status-offenders in a small Kansas community. The Truancy Diversion Program involves systems-oriented family interventions in the context of a broader community systems approach to deal with truancy. In this model, families join with the educational system, the mental health care system, and the social services system in the treatment of truant behaviors among high school students. The paper describes the role of the school counselor prior to, during, and after court intervention. The program has been established for over fourteen years and has over 338 participants. Eighty-six percent of the families who have participated in the program have students who have remained in school. Follow-up surveys have indicated satisfaction with the program and continued positive effects within the families. School administrators have begun reporting truancy earlier, which expedites referral to the program. An additional positive outcome noted is the provision for supervised training by advanced-level graduate students, including those in school counseling who gain valuable experience in truancy intervention. Appendix A is "Truancy Diversionary Counseling Program"; Appendix B is "Truancy Diversionary Counseling Contract." (Contains 21 references.) (JDM)

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Running head: A TRUANCY PROGRAM

A Truancy Program: The Successful Partnering of Schools, Parents, and Community Systems

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[1] The authors wish to thank Conni Sharp, Sonja Holsti-Wells, and Arlene Sadowski for their valuable help in preparing this paper.

CG 30301

Abstract

This article provides a description of a successful program that deals with court-ordered, truant, status-offenders. The program involves systems-oriented family interventions in the context of a broader community systems approach to dealing with truancy. Guidelines for establishing such a community-based program as well as techniques for family counseling are described.

A Truancy Program: The Successful Partnering of Schools, Parents, and Community Systems

Problems caused by truancy, staying away from school without an excuse, have been increasing in the last decade (Jenkins, 1995). The effects of leaving school before graduation have lifelong ramifications (Fergusson, Lynksey, & Horwood, 1995). Higher rates of school-related crimes, misconduct, and a resultant increase in juvenile court involvement are also seen in truant students (Carran, Nemerofsky, Rock, & Kerins, 1996). Longitudinal studies indicate increases in at-risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, early pregnancy, criminal behavior, increased incidence of depression and suicidal ideation, and eventual school drop-out in truant students (D'Angelo, Weinberger, & Feldman, 1995). Subsequent adult follow-up shows decreased socio-economic status, increased legal involvement, increased likelihood of unplanned pregnancies, divorce, and the abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

This article reports how families are joined with the educational system, the mental health care system, and the social services system in the treatment of truant behaviors by family members. It describes the role of the school counselor prior to, during, and after court intervention. The Truancy Diversion Program described here involves systems-oriented family interventions in the context of a broader community systems approach to dealing with truancy. The family counseling component of the program is provided by advanced masters and post masters students in a university training setting. It allows maximal use of community resources while at the same time providing valuable family counseling experience for advanced graduate students.

Review of Relevant Literature

Most reviews of the causes and maintenance of truant behavior identify factors in four general areas: school environment, personal deficits, family, and community (e.g. Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Rohrman, 1993; Van Petegem, 1994). School-related factors range from the learning environment associated with a specific school to more global issues of the general educational system. A tremendous variety of personal deficits have been associated with truant behavior, including low academic achievement, conduct disorder, low self-esteem, and poor social/emotional functioning. Family variables associated with higher truancy rates include lack of family involvement, negative attitudes toward education, and general family dysfunction. The larger community may also affect truancy rates in several ways. Increased rates of truant behavior are associated with involvement in a peer group that does not value school attendance. In a materialistic society with emphasis on leisure and immediate gratification, students may see school as less likely to fulfill their needs. If a community takes either no action or inconsistent action against truant offenders, truancy rates may increase as a result of tolerant or conflicting messages about the community's stance on truant behaviors.

Overall, the cause of dropping out ranked highest by school administrators and school psychologists is a dysfunctional or unstable family life, followed by lack of hope of graduating, substance abuse, emotional problems, alienation from school, parental problems, illiteracy, frustration, child abuse, and truancy (Bull, Montgomery, & McIntosh, 1993).

Traditionally, truancy intervention programs have involved individual-based, family-based, or school-based interventions in isolation (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994). Conventional interventions which have focused on school-generated problems such as peer conflict, low achievement, and low self-esteem, have yielded mixed results (Gleeson, 1994). Studies that simultaneously consider several variables, find that truancy is associated with a combination of factors rather than any one cause in isolation (e.g. Jenkins, 1995). Truancy is a complex issue and is best explained using an interactional model, where individual, school, family, and community factors operate in combination (Van Petegem, 1994). Many recognize that a combination of different types of interventions is necessary to reduce truancy rates (e.g. U.S. Department of Education, 1996; Miller, 1986), and that the effectiveness of truancy intervention can be increased by implementing a multimodal approach involving students, families, and schools (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Eastwold, 1989). Additional support of juvenile and domestic court services, police, department of social services and city/county mental health counseling services may also be utilized to maximize the impact of a truancy diversion program (Bage, 1989).

In recent years, research into the causes of truancy and subsequent interventions has increasingly focused on the school environment and educational system in general (Reynolds, 1996). However, many schools are also placing more value on an integrated services delivery model in working with their students (e.g. Shepard-Tew & Creamer, 1998). Garry (1996) describes several "promising" truancy intervention programs that involve multimodal response. Each of the featured programs "emphasize the need to

intensively monitor, counsel, and strengthen the families of and communities of truant and delinquent youth" (p. 2). A crucial element to the effectiveness of multimodal programs is close collaboration among agencies. Kleine (1994) describes problems with program efficacy when true collaboration is absent and key participants lack commitment and a clear direction.

The Truancy Diversion Program described here differs from most other interventions in that it uses a systems-oriented family counseling approach as a focus within a more comprehensive, community systems. The systems-oriented family model provides a useful framework for understanding truant behavior. The family therapy component is both empowered and augmented by a larger community systems approach, in which numerous agencies are involved, each with clearly delineated and vital roles in the reduction of truant behavior.

Description of the Model

Developing Community Involvement

A local conference of community activists in the middle 1980's identified school dropouts as one of the major problems affecting our small Kansas community. This conference consisted of physicians, ministers, public school and university counselors, public school administrators, social service workers, and other leaders in the community. These individuals collaborated to find solutions to the school dropout problem. After careful study, conference participants determined that most of the young persons who dropped out of high school had missed many days of school without excuses in upper elementary and middle school. At that time, school administrators were hesitant to file

truancy documentation because the result would be a 30-day inpatient evaluation at a state hospital facility, possibly leading to institutionalization or placement outside of the home. Or, there would be no consequences at all because of the reluctance of the judge to impose such severe penalties. It was also evident that the schools, judicial system and social services agencies were each working hard to deal with problems of truancy, but the lack of a coordinated effort undermined their success. The entire conference agreed that a coordinated effort needed to be established in order to achieve a zero tolerance for truancy.

A community systems approach was used to establish a truancy diversion program. The roles of each agency were clearly defined to avoid duplication of effort and to facilitate collaboration for all involved. Appendix A provides a description of the roles delineated for specific agencies. A community-wide public relations program was implemented to stress the importance of school attendance and the necessity of family involvement to assure the success of the program (Sheverbush & Sadowsky, 1994). Increasing family initiative was seen as a necessary component to keeping truant students in school. Kansas state statute holds parents responsible for their child's school attendance (K.S.A. 5A 72-1111[a], 1998). Enforcing the state truancy statutes assured family involvement. Grants were written to the Kansas Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, resulting in a small amount of funding to purchase materials and supplies, and to enable the supervising professors to decrease their instructional hours by one class.

The Truancy Diversion Program enabled and empowered the school administrators to report truants readily, the county attorney's office to file in a timely manner, and the judge to expedite truancy hearings. Procedures established now mandate that after a student has five unexcused absences, school officials contact the parents and encourage them to make sure their children have no more unexcused absences. This may even include a visit to the home. If unexcused absences continue, up to ten absences, the child is reported as truant to the county attorney's office. The parents are then notified of pending legal action. The case is placed on the court docket and heard in approximately two weeks. If the court determines the student to be truant, the family is given the option of participating in the diversion program. If the family chooses not to participate in the truancy diversion program, the student is then adjudged to be "a child in need of care" and may be removed from the home and placed in the custody of the state social services agency.

From the program's inception, nearly all families have chosen the diversion alternative. Once the family chooses to participate in the truancy diversion program, the case is transferred to a court services officer in charge of juvenile offenders. The office sets the initial terms of the agreement and refers the family to the diversion program. Participation in the truancy diversion program allows the family to remain intact, the student to remain in his or her school, and, upon successful completion of the program, to have all record of these charges expunged.

Role of the School Counselor

School counselors operate from the perspective that in order for a child to benefit from and receive the maximum support from school, he/she needs to be at school and on time consistently. When a child has been absent numerous days during a semester, or especially continuous days, it is the school's responsibility to find out the reasons for these absences/tardies. Daily reports from teachers and accessibility to the attendance records are two ways to check for absences/tardies. The first step to solving this problem is parent contact. Phone calls or home visits need to be done until contact is made with parents. Depending on the reason for the absence, it may be necessary to organize transportation for the child using community resources, make plans where all parties involved are responsible for making sure the child is at school on time, or even buy the family an alarm clock, if necessary. In addition, many schools have access to a school social worker who may be able to assist the school in resolving the issue giving the family additional resources to work with. In any situation, consistency is the key at this point. Parents and students need to know the school has a genuine concern about their child's tardies/absences and want to help. No matter what avenue that is taken, it is mandatory to have continuous contact with the student and parents to discuss the importance of being on time and the possible consequences if tardies/absences continue.

Unfortunately, there are times when some part of the plan does not work and the number of absences/tardies continue to increase. At this point, additional outside support is required through the county attorney's office. Parents are given opportunities to make positive changes, but if none are made, the state truancy statute is invoked and charges are

filed to adjudicate whether the child is in "need of care." During the court process, it is necessary for the school to remember that the child is still the school's responsibility and will continue to need school support to be successful. Also, it is necessary to share any attempt to resolve the problem with the county attorney to provide documentation.

After parents attend court, they have a choice of the diversion program. It is always a priority to follow through and keep in close contact with the agency assisting the family. It is important that the team identify a common goal to insure the process is a team effort. Sharing successes and failures seen both within the school and during outside counseling is an important step to assisting the family. It would be most beneficial to become part of the program the family is attending in order to best work on the goals and make the process a team approach with continuous involvement from all parties involved.

Throughout this process, there are key techniques that can be used to inspire a child to come to school. For parents, it is necessary to inform them of the school's attendance policy, its expectations and the consequences for excessive tardies/absences before truancy becomes a problem for them. Short-term positive reinforcement plans are effective for children who do not want to attend school. Once success is seen and absences/tardies decrease, the plan can be extended to cover longer periods of time before rewards are given. Overall, parents are the school's main source of support for getting children to school. No matter what, parents are the ones that need to be empowered with the resources, information and support that is available to get their child to school. Sharing ideas with parents and making them a necessary team member and not the team problem is important. If the parents are given some control and knows the school ultimately depends

on them, their view of the situation may have a positive change on the outcome of the problem. Although parents may indeed be part of the problem, there is no doubt that they are also a part of the solution.

Children who are not at school are not only missing the educational opportunities they need, they are also missing opportunities to build friendships. In addition, absences from school may lead to children not receiving the interactions with peers they need to grow socially. As a counselor, these are all issues that must be dealt with daily. It is necessary to realize, though, that the first step to assisting the students with these issues is to help them get to school.

Increasing Parent Cooperation and Initiative

The first step in the diversion program is a meeting attended by the family (student, siblings, parents and significant others), school administrators and/or counselors, court services officer, county attorney or deputy, director of the family counseling training program, and the participating therapists. The focus of the meeting is solution-oriented. Many times families come to this meeting fearful, defensive, angry and/or discouraged. By focusing on solutions and not placing blame, the team is able to convince the parents to participate and provide the truant student with the support necessary to achieve success in school. In addition to family counseling, services such as tutoring, social skills training, after school activity programs, and further diagnostic testing are offered when appropriate. At this point a diversion agreement contract is signed by all parties (Appendix B). Components of the contract include a pledge by the student to attend school regularly and participate in family therapy and all other activities as required. The family pledges to

support the student in his or her commitment to stay in school and participate in family counseling. The court services officer agrees to monitor the student's progress in school. The school official agrees to provide school support and inform the school counselor and the teachers regarding the student's participation in the program. The county attorney's office agrees to take no further action while these conditions are met and the family counseling center agrees to provide counseling to the family. It is agreed by all parties that only attendance or lack of attendance at the family sessions will be reported to the court system. It is imperative that the meeting be conducted in a non-threatening respectful manner. At the end of the meeting, the first family counseling session is scheduled.

At the initial family counseling session careful attention is given to establishing rapport, taking a thorough family history with emphasis on the family's strengths and successes, as well as setting the goals for family counseling. Because of the potential of prior negative contact with "the system," special care must be taken with the parents to define family counseling and alleviate any preconceived notions. This introduction consists not only of identifying family strengths and defusing blame, but also setting achievable, concrete goals. The subsequent sessions are devoted to establishing the hierarchy of the family and empowering the parent(s) to set clear boundaries.

Family Counseling Interventions

The counseling sessions take place on a university campus using post-graduate Masters-level students as trainee therapists and team members under the direction of an AAMFT-approved supervisor. Two co-therapists work in front of a one-way mirror with the family of the truant child while the remainder of the team observes from behind the

mirror. The team has the capacity to phone in observations or questions, and the therapists and the team employ a short conference break to construct a session-ending intervention.

The first family session begins by defining the family system and explaining how family counseling empowers the family to meet their goals of educating their children. Initial goals include positively reframing the family "problems", re-establishing the hierarchy, and identifying what the family does well. This positive approach facilitates joining with the parents at an earlier stage. Being treated respectfully by the counselors is often a new experience for these families. This procedure is essential to the success of the program.

By mid-phase the emphasis has changed from school issues based on power of the external system to solutions based upon the power of the family. Depending on family needs, a variety of interventions are employed during this phase of family counseling. The use of genograms helps the family recognize historical patterns which may be affecting the present. Family sculpting, circular questioning, role-play, paradox, metaphor, and narratives are other techniques used during this phase. Homework assignments include such activities as a play day with the family, a parent date, a family meeting to establish family rules, and paradoxical interventions such as change restraint and the "do not change" assignment. The goal of the mid-phase of counseling is to encourage the parents to focus on strengths of their family and to find solutions to issues facing the family including those involving educating their children.

The final phase of family counseling is focused on applying problem-solving and other acquired skills to potential future difficulties that may be encountered by the family, including dealing with community agencies in more productive ways. During the final phase of counseling, students report more success in school including regular attendance, improved grades, and more appropriate family and peer relationships. The parents are more empowered in their relationships and problem-solving skills. This empowerment is often manifested by more positive interaction with the school.

The final session is a capstone experience with a "graduation" ceremony. The family is invited to bring other significant persons to celebrate this occasion. Certificates of program completion are presented not only to the student but also to the family, and Polaroid pictures are taken to mark the occasion. This ritual is a monumental occasion for these families who often have had little success in the past.

The criterion for success is deliberately defined in basic, achievable terms of attending prescribed family sessions, regular school attendance, and passing grades. This allows families with a history of frequent failures to attain a positive, success experience. Families that require more in-depth individual or family therapy are referred to other social service agencies at the end of the program. However, families typically define their problems as solved once they are no longer under court order, making it very difficult to implement additional follow-up services and support.

Description of Clients

As of May, 1999, 338 clients have been seen since inception of the program. Characteristics found in most families include: history of school rule infringement, history

of parental discouragement and/or conflict with the educational system; minimal parental involvement in school activities; and prior negative contact with the social service system. Over half of the families have a history of substance abuse, with 15% of families having a parent with current substance abuse problems and 37% with past history of substance abuse. About one-half have unemployment and other financial difficulties. Parents were unemployed in 18% of the families seen, and were employed at low paying jobs in an additional 32% of the families. Only 34% of students were from intact families, 31% were from single parent households, and 32% from blended families. The remaining 3% were living with other relatives or friends at the time of referral.

Referrals were fairly evenly distributed with regard to gender, with 53% female and 47% male. The youngest referral has been of a kindergarten student and the oldest a senior in high school. Five percent of the students were from grades K-2, 20% from grades 3-6, 44% from grades 7-9, and 31% from grades 10-12. In recent years there has been a shift in referrals from high school students to middle school students and an increase in the number of elementary student referrals.

Program Outcome

Eighty-six percent of families who have participated in the program have students who have remained in school and completed the diversion contract. Unexcused absences by program participants decreased by over 90%. The truancy rate continues to decline and is currently less than half the level reported in 1985. Only four youths have been placed out of home in the past five years, and only three pregnancies were reported during the

time students were in the program. Follow-up surveys have indicated satisfaction with the program and continued positive effects within the families.

The success of this program has led to several other systemic changes. School administrators report truancy earlier, the court system acts expediently in referring families to the diversion program, and inter-agency cooperation continues to improve. The earlier the referral of the truant child, the greater the likelihood of successful truancy diversion. To encourage early referral, workshops are now conducted with elementary school principals and counselors.

Based on our own observations as well as reports by local truancy officers, there is an increased general awareness among the students and their parents that truancy will not be tolerated. This has had a positive effect on potential truants as they observe consistent enforcement of school attendance rules. In addition, parents who have completed the diversion program feel more empowered to enforce school attendance of younger siblings. Truancy seems to be endemic to certain families. Intervention with the oldest has a "trickle down" effect with the younger siblings. Parents who find empowering ways to help their older children in school are successful in using the same methods to help keep younger children interested in education. The judicial system has reported little further contact with graduates of the program. Only three families have been court-ordered to return because of truancy in other family members.

An additional positive outcome of the program is the provision of supervised training for advanced-level graduate students including school counselors who gain valuable experience in truancy intervention. Skills and knowledge of the truancy diversion

program can be "exported" to other communities when these future mental health professionals secure employment in other geographic areas upon completion of training.

Discussion

The Truancy Diversion Program represents successful implementation of systems oriented family interventions within a community systems approach to dealing with truant offenders. The program recognizes that a variety of factors are involved in the development and maintenance of truant behavior, and that effective intervention requires coordinated inter-agency collaboration. The school counselor plays an integral role in the success of the program by diagnosing school leaving problems early in the semester and encouraging families of children who continue to be truant to see the diversion program in a positive light. From the very first meeting cooperation among school, family, law enforcement, and counseling agencies is emphasized. Delineating roles and avoiding duplication of services efficiently uses resources. More importantly, the close collaboration between various agencies empowers individual components of the program, resulting in more effective interventions with truant offenders. Agencies effectively working together also model cooperation for the student who is at a point of social and emotional crisis and is alienated in relation to his or her social world. The establishment of a new context of relationships, not only for the family members relating to each other, but for the family members relating to other systems, creates a dynamic and positive framework in which to operate.

The structure of the delivery model has been expanded and modified to include the addition of a Truancy Tracking person who monitors the school attendance of all program

participants and reports that information to the courts and to the family counselors. The success of the delivery model rests on the concerted efforts of one of the supervising professors who serve as liaison among the courts, the families, and the program. Thus, information can be disseminated to families at optimal times, ensuring a greater latitude of cooperative behavior.

Based on our experiences, the family counseling component of the Truancy Diversion Program is an integral component for success. We have found that truancy is, in large part, a result of attitudes learned in the home. This is consistent with research findings that a family environment with low focus on achievement and intellectual pursuits is associated with higher rates of school absences (Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988). Devaluation of academic learning, of authority figures, and of traditional social values prevails in the families that we work with. These attitudes lead to strategies on the part of our families that subvert the potency of the school experience as a powerful social learning as well as educational institution. In nearly all of our families the parents themselves had negative experiences in school and found it difficult, despite good intent, to model the behaviors and attitudes that would promote success for their children.

An understanding of the problem of truancy from a family system's perspective offers the key to a solution. Truancy can be conceptualized as a kind of solution by the family for their developmental and/or structural inadequacies. We observed that many families needed the truancy of one member to maintain homeostasis within the family. Once this truant child left school, another child would take his or her place as the truant. Thus the problem continued to assist the whole family to maintain itself as a functioning

unit without having to face more basic problems such as alcoholism, abuse, or lack of intimacy, that might even destroy the basis of the family. This conceptualization is consistent with the application of the family model to the understanding of the protective function of truant behavior (Morrison, Olivos, Dominguez, Gomez, & Lena, 1993).

On the basis of this conceptualization, we came to use the function of the symptom of truancy as well as its timing to construct our interventions. We hypothesized that the problem of truancy arises for many families at a child's adolescence because the family is unable to accomplish the typical transitions in relationships which are needed to successfully live with teenage children. Truancy can thus be seen as a kind of maturational crisis within the family. The family members can avoid facing developmental issues such as separation, individuation, launching, and the probable instability of the marital relationship after children are raised by placing the adolescent in a role which inhibits maturation and so maintains the truant behavior. We found that when the function of the symptom was understood, the changes that needed to be facilitated in family relationships became more obvious. Focusing on strengths within the family made it easier to attain these changes.

The Truancy Diversion Program has been a successful intervention for the majority of families who choose this alternative. However, there remain those elusive families who are not helped by treatment, and whose children either drop out of school at the first possible opportunity, or whose school attendance and academic performance remain lackluster, showing little or no motivation for improvement. As we turn our sights inward, we find that the reasons for failure are circular, a product of both family systemic issues and the delivery model's shortcomings. For families with unresolved grief issues or

continued substance abuse, the court-mandated family counseling for truancy addresses only a symptom of the larger problem. The family is often unwilling to address that larger problem with the truancy treatment team, maintaining a denial that the truancy is relevant to any other family issues.

The delivery model has its own shortcomings that impact the success of treatment. As noted earlier, the Truancy Diversion Program is a based on a training and service-delivery model, and is conducted on a university campus. The university's academic schedule constrains the program, dictating a month-long semester break, a spring break, and a cessation of services through the summer due to lack of funding. Therefore, families with a truant child during the latter part of spring semester are not likely to enter the Truancy Diversion Program until the fall. Many believe their truancy problems are already solved at that point, because their child is conscientiously attending school under threat of being removed from the home by social services should the truancy continue. This reorganization under pressure feels like a solution to some families, and they are not interested in cooperation to explore the truancy any further. Their cooperation extends only to "putting in their time" so their child will not be removed from the home.

Summary

Based on our experiences with the Truancy Diversion Program, keys for successful implementation of a community systems approach to truancy diversion include identification of community needs, with broad-based community planning and participation, clear definition of roles and cooperation of participating agencies, with early identification and referral of truants. Key interventions include early diagnosis by school

counselors, as well as a truancy diversion meeting followed by systems-oriented family counseling with solution-based interventions. Finally, successful completion of the program is marked by a graduation ritual during the last family counseling session. While our experiences suggest that the factors described in this paper are key components in the effectiveness of dealing with truant behavior, further research is necessary to identify the specific program components. It is hoped that this program description will generate interest and serve as a model for further research.

The Truancy Diversion Program is now in its 14th year of community service. Many families have passes through its portals as attendees, and many post-graduate students have delivered services as therapists and team members. We believe this program models community ownership of a societal problem, using university resources for the benefit of community life.

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Appendix A

Truancy Diversionary Counseling Program

Pittsburg State University
Department of Psychology and Counseling
Eleventh District Judicial Division
Pittsburg Area Office of S.R.S.
Schools in Crawford County

I. Goals of the Program

A. To promote the growth of students educationally, emotionally, and socially.

B. To increase students' self-awareness and self-affirmation.

C. To reduce anxiety-producing situations for the group by giving information and correcting misconceptions.

D. To assist students and their parents in developing positive attitudes toward the school and to assist the school in maintaining positive attitudes toward these students.

E. To encourage students to take advantage of the opportunities, both academic and extracurricular, offered by the school.

II. Procedures

A. Truant students are reported by school officials to the County Attorney's office.

B. County Attorney's office files a petition for Child in Need of Care.

C. Child placed on informal supervision pursuant to statute with the condition of informal supervision being successful participation in the program.

D. Court Services officer notifies the Program Director.

E. Program Director or his designated assistant contacts the family, describes the program, and initiates counseling.

F. Counseling will continue for up to six months on an as-needed basis determined by Dr. Robert Sheverbush and practicum students. Dr. Sheverbush and student counselors will deem the proper method of feedback to Court Services. Failure to attend counseling sessions and participate actively in the treatment program will be reported immediately to Court Services with the understanding that the treatment program will be terminated or revised for that individual.

G. Truancy Tracking Officer follows student progress in the referring school.

H. Court Services will request the County Attorney to file application for revocation of informal supervision.

III. Role of the County Attorney's Office

The role of the county Attorney's Office in this program is one of initial determination. That is, it is the County Attorney's Office who decides whether or not the program will be offered to the truant.

Before making this determination, the County Attorney will receive input from school officials who are more familiar with the truant's history. This input is usually in letter form, received from the vice-principal in charge of attendance and discipline. However, the County Attorney may also discuss the matter with school counselors and others who may be able to provide valuable information in order to make a more informed decision.

Once there has been a determination that the truant would benefit from the program, the County Attorney will file a Child in Need of Care Petition, pursuant to K.S.A. 28-1501, et seq., on the basis of truancy. The Petition will be accompanied with a letter to the Clerk of the Court stating that the County Attorney will be recommending informal supervision under the provisions of K.S.A. 38-1544. The matter will then be set for first appearance on the juvenile docket.

At the first appearance, the State will recommend informal supervision for a period of six (6) months with the condition that the truant successfully complete the Truancy Prevention and Diversion Program. If the Court follows the recommendation, the matter will be referred to the Court Service Officer for an initial interview.

After the initial interview is completed, the Court Service Officer will set up an intake meeting with the following persons in attendance: The County Attorney, the truant, the truant's family, the counselor, the director of the program and a representative of the school. At this meeting all interested parties will sign the counseling agreement. The presence of school officials and representatives from the legal system is essential to show the truant the seriousness of his or her situation while lending support to the truant and his or her family.

The County Attorney's role is complete when the truant successfully finishes the program. If the truant fails to successfully finish the program, the County Attorney will then file a motion with the Court asking the Court to revoke the informal supervision and declare the truant to be a Child in Need of Care.

IV. Role of the Department of Psychology and Counseling

The Department of Psychology and Counseling at Pittsburg State University is excited about the possibility of entering into an agreement with the County Attorney, the schools, the court system, etc. to set up a cooperative truancy diversional program. This program would work with students and their families who are referred from the County Attorney's office for up to six (6) months of counseling and group work. All of some of the following types if treatment will be provided: 1) counseling with the students and their families, 2) group counseling and skill building with students, 3) diagnostic workups where necessary, 4) referral to other support personnel where necessary and appropriate, such as reading specialists, learning disabilities specialists, etc.

The program will coordinated at Pittsburg State by Dr. Robert L Sheverbush with the assistance of a graduate assistant for ten hours per week during the nine month school year from September through May. Actual counseling will be done by advanced graduate students in the Psychology and Counseling program. Additional tutoring and support may be provided by undergraduate psychology majors. Clinical facilities will be obtained and remodeled in Shirk Hall in addition to those already available in Hughes Hall. Close consultation will be maintained with the schools. It is hoped that school counselors will be able to participate as co-therapists in situations where it seems appropriate. The director of the program for the University will provide feedback to the court concerning progress of the truant students and their families and will also reserve the right to refer families and individual students who are not cooperative back to the court.

V. Role of School

A. Principal and Assistant Principal (Middle School to begin with)

Monitor attendance.

Notify school counselors of students with three consecutive unexcused absences of five unexcused absences in a semester.

Notify parents by phone if possible.

Send truancy letter to parents by certified mail. The letter will contain information on compulsory education law and the diversion program.

Notify the Pittsburg State University Diversion Coordinator by phone.

Notify the Assistant County Attorney of the truant's name, birthdate, address, phone number, and parent or guardian.

Attend Monday evening intake meetings with a Pittsburg State University counselor, the school counselor, and the Assistant County Attorney.

B. Teachers

Inform principals of students absent for three consecutive days or five days in a semester.

C. Counselors

Notify parents of student absences after three consecutive days or five days in a semester.

Set up counseling sessions with students.

Attend co-counseling sessions at Pittsburg State University for diversion program.

Attend intake meetings with the Principal, the Assistant County Attorney, and the Pittsburg State University Diversion Coordinator.

D. Skipping School – Principal and Assistant Principal

Notify parents.

Notify school counselors.

Notify Pittsburg State University Diversion Director.

Assign the student to attend counseling sessions at Pittsburg State University in lieu of suspension.

VI. Role of the Pittsburg Area Office of S.R.S.

Where truants or potential truants are under the jurisdiction of S.R.S., the same procedures will be followed as with other students. However, the S.R.S. case worker will be a part of the Truancy Diversionary team and will participate in the opening conference for the case. Periodic reports concerning the progress of the truant student and his/her family will be provided to the S.R.S. case worker. Upon some occasions, the case worker will also be asked to participate in the family therapy program.

VII. Role of the Truancy Tracking Program

GOALS:

1. Youth will attend school on a regular basis.

2. Youth will comply with the established curfew set by his/her Court Service Officer.

3. Youth will obey all the conditions of supervision.

4. Youth will complete The Pittsburg State University Truancy Counseling Program (if applicable).

OBJECTIVES:

1. Youth will be monitored with monthly visits to ensure their attendance is in accordance with policies and regulations of the school. Monthly updated lists of youths currently monitored by the Truancy Tracking Program will be provided to the area schools. This list will allow the designated school official(s) to contact the Truancy Tracking Program in the event of a client's absence.

2. A separate file on youth will be maintained by the Truancy Tracking Program. Reports will be prepared and given to the C.S.O. and Pittsburg State University Truancy Counseling Program on a monthly basis. Any significant events that require court involvement will be reported immediately to the C.S.O.

3. Monthly meetings with Court Services and Pittsburg State University will be orchestrated to maintain open communication lines between the three entities.

Appendix B

TRUANCY DIVERSION COUNSELING CONTRACT

_____ hereby states and affirms that he/she is the Principal/Assistant Principal for School and has reported to the Crawford County Attorney's office that _____ is truant as defined by the laws of Kansas. This truancy is evidenced by the following unexcused absences: _____; Part days _____.

_____ hereby states and affirms that he/she has filed a petition in the District Court of Crawford County asking the Court to find _____ is a Child in Need of Care as defined by K.S.A. 38-1502. The basis of this Petition is truancy as defined by K.S.A. 72-1113.

_____ further states that he/she has discussed this matter with the Court Services Officer, _____and the Director of the Truancy Diversion Counseling Program. All of the above parties have agreed to offer this program to the _____ family.

_____, the parents of _____, hereby agree to actively participate in the program and fully cooperate with the counselors. Participation and cooperation includes, but is not limited to, attendance of all family members at all scheduled sessions as requested by the Director of the Truancy Diversion Program; being prompt in arriving for each appointment; and complying with any and all other conditions set by the Court Services Officer and the family's counselor. This participation shall continue until the family is released from the program by the Program Director. Failure to attend a single session could result in termination of informal supervision and removal of the child from the home.

_____ hereby agrees to actively participate in the program and fully cooperate with the counselors. Participation and cooperation includes, but is not limited to, attendance of all family members at all scheduled sessions as requested by the Program Director; being prompt in arriving for each appointment; and complying with any and all other conditions set by the Court Services Officer and the family's counselor. This participation and cooperation shall continue until the family is released from the program by the Program Director. Failure to attend a single session could result in termination of informal supervision and removal of said child from the home.

The _____ family hereby agrees to pay a $25.00 fee for participation in the counseling program.

In exchange for the family's participation, the County Attorney's office agrees not to pursue other remedies provided by law including removal of the child from the home. The County Attorney's Office further agrees to refrain from terminating the period of informal supervision as long as the family is attending scheduled sessions and meeting all other conditions set by the Court or Court Services Office.

The Court Services Office agrees to monitor school attendance and progress in the counseling program.

_____, Principal/Assistant Principal, agrees to cooperate in the program by providing support for the child at school and by monitoring school attendance.

The Director of Truancy Diversion counseling program agrees to supervise the program and inform the Court Services Office of progress or lack of progress being made by the family in the program.

After successful completion of the program and with the recommendation of the Program Director, the County Attorney's office will recommend to the Court termination of informal supervision and release of the truant from the court's jurisdiction provided the family has complied with all other conditions of informal supervision.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, The parties have hereunto set their hands;

Date: _____ _____

Parent

Date: _____ _____

Parent

Date: _____ _____

Child

Date: _____ _____

Sibling

Date: _____ _____

Sibling

Date: _____ _____

School Official

Date: _____ _____

Court Service Office

Date: _____ _____

County Attorney's Office

Date: _____ _____

Program Director of designee